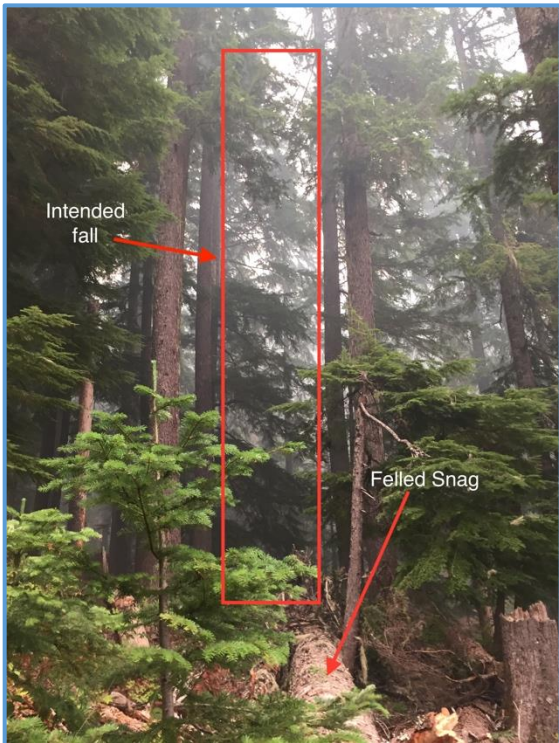


Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Faller Hit by Tree Top

Date: September 3, 2017

Location: Whitewater Fire, Oregon



A Type 2 IA Crew was prepping a road for possible firing operations on Division Kilo of the Whitewater Fire. A snag was identified as a possible hazard. A crew sawyer prepared to cut it. The snag was approximately 15 inches DBH and 40 feet tall. The natural lean of the tree was toward several standing green trees with overlapping canopy.

After a standard size-up, the decision was made by the sawyer to fall the tree in the direction of its natural lean—planning for it to land directly between the standing green trees (see photo on left). The sawyer expected the snag to push through the green trees' canopies.

The sawyer cleared the cutting area and prepared to cut the tree. As the sawyer completed the back cut, the tree started to fall exactly as intended. As the tree committed to the fall, the sawyer took a few steps downhill away from the stump and then paused to look back to make sure that everything was going as planned.

Five-Foot Section of Snag Strikes Sawyer

The sawyer saw the top half of the tree break and start to come back toward him. He immediately started moving along his escape route as quickly as possible. The sawyer was struck on the head and right shoulder by a five-foot section of the snag. The blow swiped the hard hat off and damaged the rear portion of the hard hat suspension system (see photo

below).

The five-foot section of the tree that struck the sawyer was separated from the main portion of the snag when it hit the sawyer. It is not known exactly how and when this top section broke and propelled toward the sawyer.

It's possible the top section broke at the same time the other part of the snag broke during the initial contact with the green tree canopies. It is also possible that the top section broke upon contact with the stump and was flung toward the sawyer as he escaped the stump.

The two other crew members who witnessed the event did not immediately realize that the sawyer had been struck. It almost appeared as if the sawyer had just slipped as he made his way out.

As the two other crewmembers came up to the cutting area they found the damaged hard hat and realized that the sawyer had been hit. They immediately notified the Saw Boss, who then ran down the road to their location. The sawyer was walking around and seemed to be fine other than





being a bit dazed. The Saw Boss notified the Crew Boss who notified the Task Force Leader. Both the EMT and the Paramedic assigned to the Division responded immediately.

It was determined that the Crew Boss would assume the role of Medical Incident IC. He began recording information on the Medical Incident Report in collaboration with the medical personnel. Next, the Medical Incident Report was relayed to ICP and the patient was transported back to camp and then to a hospital via an agency owned vehicle (AOV) for evaluation.

After a full evaluation at the hospital, it was determined there was no significant injuries beyond a cut and slight bruising to the right rear shoulder area. The sawyer was released back to full duty.



LESSONS

Where Should You Look?

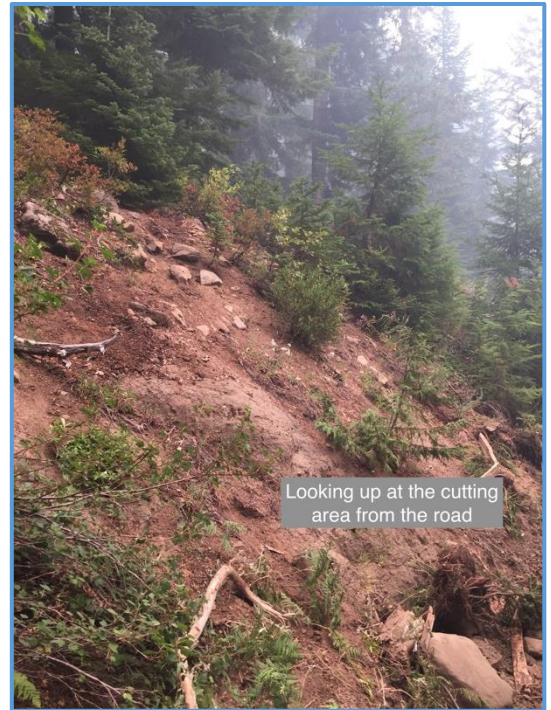
In the words of one of the crewmembers who witnessed this event:
“My lesson is to get away from the stump as fast as you possibly can.”

These are wise words given how often falling accidents occur in the immediate vicinity of the stump. It also brings up the dilemma of turning to watch the tree fall as you escape.

Many fallers will attest to keeping an eye on a tree as much as possible as it falls. When one’s escape route is over rough ground—or extremely steep as in this incident (see photo on right)—it’s almost as if you have to choose one or the other.

Do you focus on escape and not pause to look back? Or do you take a few steps and pause for a quick glance back to make sure everything is good?

You will have to make this decision for yourself. Use this incident as a way to discuss this “where to look” dilemma with fellow sawyers.



When Falling a Tree through Other Canopies . . .

If you decide to fall a dead tree through other tree canopies, always acknowledge the increased potential for this dead tree to break as it falls.

In this incident, even though this tree went exactly where it was intended to go, it was surprising how little resistance it took to snap the tree in half.

The Lesson: Make sure to consider this possibility if you are considering falling a tree through other canopies.

This RLS was submitted by:

Incident Overhead

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